Late Ottoman Discourses on Nationalism and Islam and the Contributions of Russia's Muslims

Mustafa Gökçek

Abstract

This study focuses on the early twentieth-century nationalist and Islamist discourses in the Ottoman Empire. Particularly after the 1908 coup, Turkish and Arab nationalism spread among the intellectuals. Under the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) party's leadership, Turkish nationalists received tremendous support to spread their views through associations and publications. Some of them defended the compatibility of Turkish nationalism with Islam. In response, traditional Islamist intellectuals argued that Islam was opposed to nationalism and tribalism and pointed out the potential dangers of pursuing nationalism in a multiethnic society.

This article mostly focuses on the nationalist and traditionalist intellectuals. Among the first group was Halim Sabit, a Kazan Tatar who moved to Istanbul from Russia to pursue religious studies at a madrasa. He eventually became heavily involved in nationalist circles and published articles in *Sırat-ı Mustakım* and *İslam Mecmuası* on how Islam allowed nationalism and how Turkish nationalism could serve Islam. At the same time, he participated in a trip to the Middle East to convince the Arabs of the need for Islamic unity. In contrast to Musa Kazım, Said Nursi, and other intellectuals, Sabit emphasized the unity of Muslim nations within the empire.

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Mustafa Gökçek is an associate professor in the Department of History and director of MA - Interdisciplinary Studies, at Niagara University, Lewiston, NY. He earned his BA and MA in international relations at Bilkent University (Ankara) and completed his doctoral studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. His research focuses on Russian and Turkish intellectual relations at the turn of the twentieth century.

Introduction

In order to understand the historical context in which intellectual debates took place in the late Ottoman Empire, one must focus on the establishment of the constitutional regime after the 1908 revolution. Although nationalist movements existed within the empire before this event, Turkish and Arab nationalism increasingly raised their voices in the post-revolutionary context. The influx of Turkish nationalist intellectuals from Russia led to the emergence of Turkist organizations and publications. These journals quickly became mediums where ideas of nationalism, their compatibility with Islam, and the nature of governance were fiercely discussed and even newer ideas were developed. In addition, the context of this free discussion of ideas allowed Arab intellectuals and political figures to express their discontent with the government, which they increasingly associated with Turkism. Although the CUP's primary concern was to "perpetuate the imperial political traditions within a multiethnic and multi-religious framework," it could not escape the Arabs' "Turkification" charges.[1]

This was the context within which such intellectuals as Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924), Halim Sabit (1883-1946), and Musa Kazım (1882-1948) discussed nationalism's role and place in Islam from various perspectives. Gökalp and Sabit sought to justify nationalism in Islamic terms to convince the Islamist intellectual establishment to support it.[2] However the reaction from the more traditional Islamist circles was harsh and rejected all forms of nationalism as unacceptable.

Islamizing Turkish Nationalism

One of the journals that addressed Islam and nationalism during this period was the CUP-supported *İslam Mecmuası*. Adhering to its motto of "A life with religion, a religion with life," it sought to introduce reformist interpretations of Islam to reconcile it with modern life. A major topic right from the beginning was how to combine sociology and fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Sabit's articles on *usul-u fikıh* (legal methodology or legal theory/hermeneutics) followed Gökalp's "Fiqh and Sociology" and "Social *Usul al-Fiqh*," which were published in the second and third issues, respectively.[3] These and subsequent articles by Sabit, Mehmed Şerafeddin (1879-1947), and others established a new way to look at Islamic jurisprudence, one that would have implications for the understanding of nationalism. This approach started a debate among intellectual circles on Turkish nationalism, to which İzmirli İsmail Hakkı (1869-1946) responded to through the pages of *Sebilürreşad*.

In these articles, Gökalp asserts that the actions of human beings can be categorized as good and evil (*hüsn ve kubh*). Importantly, he defines fiqh as the science that evaluates human actions from this particular perspective. He develops his argument by adding that fiqh uses two criteria here: *nass* (scriptural texts; the evidence found in the Qur'an and Sunnah) and *örf* (custom; the social conscience as reflected in a given society's practical aspect). This results in the view that Islamic law has two bases, a coupling of divine revelation with social norms. In his historical analysis, Gökalp states that since sociology is a recently established science, the initial formation of fiqh as a science was based almost solely upon the divine revelation. However, the passage of time necessitated a larger role for social interpretations, as *nass* had become incapable of responding to all social problems on its own. Only *örf* could do this satisfactorily, for it changes with time and thus can assume different forms in different societies: "The permission for changing judgments in changing times is an outcome of the change in social contexts anyway, isn't it? According to some scholars of fiqh, if *nass* is an outcome of *örf*, then it is permissible to interpret *nass* as well."[4]

This approach has two major implications. First, it places social judgment next to the divine sources of Islamic law. Thus Gökalp distinguishes between *nassi usul-u fıkıh* (legal methodology based on revelation) and *ictimai usul-u fıkıh* (legal methodology based on social norms), a quite revolutionary change for the long-established science of fiqh. As a result, all judgments related to social, political, and current issues have to be based on the society in which one is living, whereas classical fiqh is limited to the realm of spirituality. Even the authority for making judgments based on individual interpretation could be given to scholars of non-Islamic sciences, such as sociologists or politicians: "[S]ociologists are responsible for guiding the scholars of fiqh in the world of sociology … That's [because] neither sociologists nor scholars of fiqh can make it alone. This new science cannot be established unless these two groups have scholarly assistance from each other."[5]

Second, this perspective reevaluates the primary Islamic legal sources based on their connection to *örf*. The end of Gökalp's first article on Islamic education in *İslam Mecmuası* hinted at this point. Eliminating the influences of other cultures on Islam, especially purifying religion by eliminating Arab cultural traits, implies the creation of national religions and a complete reformation of even the most basic principles of Islamic law and practice. Although Gökalp mentions that he does not advocate replacing traditional fiqh with his new approach, the implication of placing *örf* ahead of *nass* does exactly that.

These views suggest, one can argue, that at this point in his intellectual journey, Gökalp was trying to develop a legal methodology that could be justified by religious legal traditions. He seeks common ground between a religious and national construction of the legal system. In a way, he urges religious scholars to incorporate national cultural values into the religious system of legislation. One might explain this inclusive approach as a recognition of the need to construct a unifying bond among the empire's Muslim nations within the context of WW I. At a time when the empire desperately needed such an identity to hold on to its remaining Muslim nationalities, Gökalp's nationalist tendencies were in a way suppressed by a more conciliatory approach toward religion.

Considering that these articles were his first major intellectual products after his renowned article "*Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak,*" one can also view him as moving away from a more balanced approach between Islam and Turkism toward one that was leaning more toward Turkism and away from Islamic concerns. In several articles on religion and jurisprudence, he develops his approach into a system that does not connect religion with justice or any material issues, but as something that acts only within the realm of spirituality: "Religious public opinion relates to the ideas and feelings that should remain in a spiritual and divine nature."[6] In this way, he paves the way for a secular, nation-based legal and administrative system.

The theory of *ictimai usul-u fıkıh* (the social methodology of Islamic jurisprudence) and the following debate was of crucial significance during this period's intellectual history because it was directly related to the secularization and nationalization of the state. A new approach to the legal system, one that introduced "social conscience" as the basis of legislation, would not only divide the religious and legal spheres, but would also allow the state to devise and implement laws on the basis of national identity.

Right after Gökalp completed his trilogy of articles on *ictimai usul-u fıkıh*, Sabit started to publish a series of articles under the same title.[7] His approach, however, is far more grounded in the fiqh point of view than Gökalp's sociological perspective. Sabit supports Gökalp's theory by bringing examples and evidence from Islamic legal history. In fact, one can imagine the conversations between the two men, with Sabit providing the Islamic legal arguments and Gökalp presenting the matching concepts found in European sociological scholarship. If Gökalp introduced the social *usul-u fıkıh* as a sociological theory, Sabit established it on Islamic legal grounds and prepared practical guidelines for it.

Before delving further into Sabit's contribution to Gökalp's theory, one should have some knowledge of his personal background in order to situate

his views within the correct context. Unfortunately, his biography is less studied in the literature than are those of his contemporaries. Sabit, who eventually became one of the late empire's most active intellectuals, deserves special attention for several reasons. First, he was among the Russian Muslim intellectuals who immigrated and involved themselves in the late Ottoman intellectual debates and, later on, in the republic's construction. He was also quite productive: An active participant in political and intellectual circles, he continuously published journals and books, especially during the CUP's rule. His Kazan Tatar background and education in both Kazan and Istanbul enabled him to combine traditional Islamic and nationalist tendencies in his philosophy. Therefore, he was able to approach Turkish nationalist problems from an Islamic perspective and to legitimize them within religious terms at a time when the majority of traditionalist intellectuals harshly condemned all nationalist tendencies.

Despite these characteristics, no scholars examined Sabit's life and views until the mid-1990s. The official reluctance to put non-Anatolian émigrés' names in the forefront of the intellectual history of the nationalist struggle, as well as his association with the CUP, were most probably among the reasons why his name was seldom mentioned in historiography.

Born in the small village of Küçük Tarhanlı (Malyi Tarkhan') in Russia's Simbirsk province, his father possessed a Bulgar-Turk *mirza* (princely) ancestry and thus was known as "Şibay" (which he later adopted as his last name). In 1902, after completing his elementary school and madrasa education in Russia, Sabit moved to Istanbul to continue his education. An interesting anecdote here gives an idea about the nature of the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Russia's Muslims at the time. While hugging her goodbye, his mother revealed a secret: "O my son, when you were born we promised to send you to Istanbul. There you would get an education and then take your whole family, parents and siblings, with you. Now my dream is coming true. Even if I die and cannot see that day, I am still happy to see the first part of it come true." Istanbul's image in the minds of Muslims, especially those living in Russia, was that of a safe haven, a place of salvation.

Sabit went to Istanbul, graduated from the Fatih madrasa, the Mercan middle school, and finally from the Darülfünun (later Istanbul University) Divinity School (Advanced Sciences of Religion) in 1910 with an excellent degree in Islamic legal methodology. After passing the test to acquire a teacher's certificate, he left for Russia, traveling all the way to the Altay Mountains. He published his travel notes on its Turkish-Muslim nations as a series of articles entitled "Altaylara Doğru" (Towards the Altays) in *Türk Yurdu*. During this trip he visited his hometown and, in 1911, married Zeliha, a distant relative

of Yusuf Akcura. Later on he was able to bring his father, his two brothers, and a sister with him to Istanbul. And so he fulfilled his mother's dream; unfortunately, she had passed away while he was in Istanbul.

After his return to Turkey, in 1911 he began to teach religious studies at the Gelenbevi High School.[8] He then became a full-time professor at the Darülfünun in 1915, where he taught the history of Islam in the Department of Literature.[9] Among his colleagues there were Gökalp, M. Şemseddin (Günaltay) (1883-1961), and Yahya Kemal (1884-1958). After the CUP fell from power in 1919, his courses were cancelled and he was ousted from the university due to his association with the party. From 1919 to 1939 Sabit focused on business. At the last stage of his life, he returned to intellectual production. In 1939 he began working on publishing the *Encyclopedia of Islam*. In 1944 he was appointed to the Directorate of Religious Affairs as a member of the Advisory Committee, an appointment that he held until his death on December 27, 1946.[10]

Especially before 1919, Sabit was actively involved in publishing and teaching. An enthusiastic participant in intellectual (especially Turkist) circles, he also had connections with the CUP government. The meetings in which he participated included one secretly organized by Talat Pasha (1874-1921) to choose those Turkist intellectuals who would settle in Anatolia in order to encourage the people to join the national struggle during WWI.[11] He was invited to Berlin several times to observe the conditions of Muslim prisoners of war captured by the Germans. He also joined the committee that visited the 4th Army Branch in Syria, commanded by Cemal Pasha (1872-1922), in November 1916.

Sabit was a very productive scholar between 1910 and 1919. Although his major articles were not published in a book, his first work during this period was his volume-length travel notes, *Altaylara Seyahat*, which appeared in the influential Turkist journal *Türk Yurdu*. From 1912 to 1916 he published *Ameli İlmihal* (*A Guide for Islamic Practice*) for the primary schools established by the CUP. This five-book series, which included separate versions for students and teachers, was published several times and enjoyed wide circulation and use.

At the same time, he was invited to join the Committee on Madrasa Reform (Islah-ı Medaris Encümeni) led by Seyhulislam Musa Kazım.[12] As a member of this committee, in 1914 he published a treatise entitled *Ulema ve Talebe-i Ulum Efendilere- Islah-ı Medaris Münasebetiyle* (*To the Scholars and Students Regarding the Madrasa Reform*). The committee's work culminated in the *Regulation on Reform of Madrasas* (*Islah-ı Medaris Nizam-*

namesi) on October 1, 1914.[13] It adopted many of Sabit's suggestions, among them that all madrasas be unified into a single institution to be known as Dar'ül Hilafet'ül Aliye Madrasa (the Istanbul Madrasa), that highly selective examinations be held during the admission process and at the end of each year, and that course titles be listed by subjects instead of the titles of the books to be studied.

This madrasa was divided into three stages, as he also suggested, with each stage having four grades. The third stage focused exclusively on the advanced Islamic sciences. Many of the course titles he suggested were established for the first time due to this reform, such as various science courses, economics, pedagogy, philosophy, astronomy, and law. These fundamental changes had a lasting impact even after the madrasas were closed. Contemporary Turkey's Schools of Divinity and the Imam Hatip schools are still modeled on the structure and curriculua established by this long-ago reform.

Sabit continued to publish articles in the empire's leading journals. For example, he published a series of sixteen articles on "İctihada Dair" ("About Ijtihad") in *Sırat-ı Müstakim* and twenty articles on "Hacc ve Kabe" ("Hajj and the Ka'bah") in *Sebilürreşad*. He published another series of articles on "Kablel İslam Arabların Dini ve İctimai Hayatı" ("The Religious and Social Life of Arabs before Islam") in *İctimaiyyat Mecmuası*, and on "Aile Tarihi: İslam öncesi ve sonrası İzdivac" ("The History of Family: Marriage before and after Islam") in *Yeni Mecmua*. During this period he also closely followed Central Asian publications, especially those among the Tatars. He regularly included news from Russia's Muslims and re-published articles that had already been published in Central Asian newspapers and journals in *İslam Mecmuası*.

He was close friends with Yusuf Akçura, Gökalp, Ahmed Ağaoğlu, Hüseyinzade Ali Turan, Fuad Köprülü, and other contemporaneous Turkist and Islamist intellectuals. His friendship with Gökalp was quite close. Gökalp was influential in securing a position for Sabit in Darülfünun's Literature Department. In fact, Sabit's most influential work, *İslam Mecmuası*, was a joint product conducted by both of them. After Gökalp's death, Sabit published several articles on their shared memories[14] in which he recounted how Gökalp would discuss intellectual, national, and educational ideas with his close friends during long night *şölenler* (feasts) gatherings. Sabit mentioned Ağaoğlu, Şemsettin, Kemal, and himself as being among the attendees.

Sabit was especially connected with the Turkic peoples and intellectuals from Russia through his continuous correspondence with major Turkic figures living there. He published articles in Central Asian journals and met with them whenever they visited Istanbul.

His major intellectual product was *Islam Mecmuası*. Following the road map drawn by Gökalp, Sabit devoted several articles to a lengthy discussion of the definition of *örf*. He provided several examples of how the Qur'an utilizes *örf* and *maruf* and concluded that it uses *örf* for "what public conscience perceives as good." Sabit proposes that when acts regarding life are reinforced by revelation, only the living continuation of *örf* enables the revelation to survive in a meaningful way. When *örf* changes and the society's perception of that act turns from good to evil, then that act is dropped because revelation can no longer affirm it. He presents almsgiving as an example. Among those originally entitled to such funds are those whose hearts are to be reconciled (*müellefe-i kulub*), as mentioned specifically in the Qur'an. Although no later verse ever abrogated (*nesh*) this revelation, during Abu Bakr's reign the Companions discussed whether this verse should remain in effect. Umar ibn al-Khattab eventually ended this practice on the grounds that it was no longer needed. Sabit argues that it was the change in *örf*, the people's positive perceptions of that act, that caused this verse's nullification.[15]

He strengthens his argument with examples from Islamic legal history. For example, Imam Malik accepted the social traditions of Madinah's people as a *sunnah* established among the people. Imam Yusuf, a leading scholar of Hanafi fiqh, ruled that when *örf* and *nass* contradict each other, if the *nass* is based on *örf* then *örf* is preferred. Sabit argues that before sociology developed into a science, such judgments attaching importance to *örf* were critical indicators of the role that it can play within the Islamic legal system.

From this point of view, the only way for Islamic law to remain alive under different conditions, among different societies, and until the end of time is by developing a social *usul-u fıkıh*: "[I]n this case, it means that with the revival of both fiqh and *usul-u fıkıh*, and for them to be alive in all ages, it is essential for 'social *usul-u fıkıh*' to be established, which shows that there are relations between Islamic law and life."[16] I would like to note the connection here between such phrases as "Islamic law can remain alive" and the "relations between Islamic law and life" with the motto of *İslam Mecmuası*: "A life with religion, a religion with life." In light of these articles by Gökalp and Sabit, the emphasis on "life" can be associated with society and social norms.

An interesting argument and metaphor that Sabit utilizes occurs in the phrase "law of creation." In the history of Islamic sciences, those sciences that deal with nature, the universe, and human beings are classified as "law of creation." Following Gökalp, Sabit argues that social norms are part of the law of creation and thus should be accepted and noticed as such. Once *örf* changes

the act that used to be perceived as good, that act stops being alive and separates itself from the "law of creation."[17] Thus, according to this view *örf* is the connection between life and religion, which makes *İslam Mecmuası*'s motto even more meaningful.

Like Gökalp, Sabit utilizes the concepts of *hüsn* (good) and *kubh* (evil) to imply the existence of a division between *nass* and *örf*. He gives a few examples to demonstrate how all of the revelation's commands are classified as good deeds, but that not all good deeds are ordered by revelation. Therefore good and evil include but are not limited to *nass* (explicit scriptural statements).[18] The major indicator of good and evil is *örf*, defined here as social conscience.

This issue is strictly related to ijtihad. Beginning from the very early stages of Islamic history, all of the problems facing the community were resolved according to the Qur'an's directions and the Prophet's example. However, whenever the community faced a new and previously unaddressed issue, Muslim scholars either deduced judgments through analogies (*kıyas*) based on similar judgments found in the Qur'an and Hadith or developed their own opinions based on the particular revelation's context. Sabit mentions several examples from the time of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and argues that the scholars of that time, when they could not find a reference to a problem in the Qur'an and Sunnah, based their decisions on *maruf* (the good) as recognized by the social conscience.

In his articles, Sabit brings forth quite a strong argument for the legitimacy of *örf* in *usul-u fıkıh*.[19] He focuses on several other key jurisprudential concepts, such as *maruf*, *icma*, *kıyas*, and *takva* to support *örf*'s centrality in legislation. These articles are perfect examples of how Sabit was far more successful than Gökalp in utilizing the inner methods of decisionmaking in fiqh. The terminology he used, the theoretical framework he established, and the examples he provided from Islamic legal history are indicative of his strong background in fiqh. Sabit reproduced the strong emphasis of later Hanafi scholars on *örf* as a source of law.[20] The conclusions may not be very reliable or well-received by traditional Muslim scholars, despite the fact that he clearly and successfully laid out his arguments by using the tools of Islamic legal methodology.

Although Sabit strongly grounded his arguments and employed the methodology of fiqh quite successfully and convincingly, they do contain some shortcomings. For example, he builds the aspects of his argument on those revelations that approve of *örf*, even though his main purpose is how to explain those revelations that change, challenge, or replace *örf*. The history of Islam, especially the Prophet's life, is full of examples in which a norm has been ac-

cepted by a society as good or neutral is nevertheless prohibited or limited by revelation. Those verses that prohibited alcohol; elevated the status of women, the poor, and other oppressed social groups; established equality; and delimited, if not completely eliminating, slavery could be given as examples of how the Qur'an itself challenges both *örf* and *maruf*. Thus, Islam did not consider "social conscience" to be the ultimate criteria in its judgments.

İzmirli İsmail Hakkı proposed this and other points in his *Sebilürreşad* response to Sabit and Gökalp's theory. In his articles, he severely criticized the *örf*-based social-legal theory and argued that while *örf* can be an acceptable source of judgment in *usul-u fıkıh*, it can be so only as long as it does not contradict revelation and stays within the latter's limits.[21] As a result, although the theory of social *usul-u fıkıh* did not create any great reform movement among traditionalist circles, it did pave the way for a secular state and a division between secular and divine law. The characteristic of this debate, as reflected in *İslam Mecmuası*, was the effort to produce an argument based on Islamic law and, as a result, a hope for gaining a following among the traditional scholars of this topic. Sabit's contribution was crucial to presenting Gökalp's message in a stronger and more Islamic way.

As Sami Erdem points out,[22] in his criticisms Izmirli never mentioned Gökalp or Sabit by name. While he clearly referred to the journal and the issues raised therein, he refrained from starting a direct conflict with either scholar perhaps because the journal enjoyed the CUP's support. Thus political concerns might have led him to be more polite and allusive. Besides, his criticisms were directed more toward Gökalp than Sabit. In my view, there are two possible reasons for this bias. First, as mentioned above, Sabit successfully utilized his expertise in *usul-u fıkıh* and Islamic legal history. In a way he spoke "from within" as a member of the community of Islamic scholars. The concepts he employed, the methodology he pursued, and the arguments he proposed were far more understandable, acceptable, or at least excusable in Izmirli's eyes. Gökalp, on the other hand, was an "outsider" in terms of his scholarship, a "pure Turkist" who employed the concepts and methods of "European" sociology more than those of traditional *usul-u fıkıh*. Second, Sabit used to publish articles in *Sırat-ı Mustakim*, where Izmirli was his colleague. This long-standing friendship might have caused this critic to be more lenient when discussing Sabit's ideas.

In his later articles for the journal, Sabit outlined the late Ottoman Empire's state administrative system as he saw it.[23] The religious branch of administration, represented by the caliph, was divided into the legal and educational sections. Whereas the members of the religious legal council were versed in both

nass and *örf*, the religious educational division had a top-down hierarchical structure: the *şeyhulislam*, a directorate of religious education, *müftü*, *vaiz*, *hatip*, and imam. At the same time the legal branch of administration, which was responsible for justice, education, and government, was represented by the sultan and Parliament. According to this view, its decisions should have religious legal legitimacy: "Religion is such a power that only religion can limit itself. Religion itself should state that law is a matter of state."[24] However, the theoretical background was not yet ready for such a transfer of legislative power: "According to these observations, the laws passed by the legal legislature council are naturally of Islamic law. But since a new *usul-u fıkıh* has not been formulated, this detailed legal theory of our age has not been established yet… This is what *İslam Mecmuası* strives for."[25]

This approach clearly indicates a separation between the religious and the legal branches. The harmony between them depends upon the former's acceptance of the latter's actions as both legal and acceptable from the point of view of Islamic law. These ideas also constitute a link between late Ottoman intellectual thought and the reforms that would take place during the early Republican period. The theoretical framework, which abolished the sultanate and let Parliament represent the legislative authority, as well as the caliphate's subsequent abolition and letting Parliament represent it as well, were laid out in journals such as *İslam Mecmuası* and by writers such as Sabit.

The implication of employing *örf* as the central Islamic legal principle was that a state established on nationalist principles could uphold the traditional law and norms of its society and culture. Partly on account of this reformist agenda, the theory of social *usul-u fıkıh* met with fierce resistance from the more traditionalist intellectuals.

A common view expressed by most Islamist authors who touched upon the Muslim world's decline was that Islam should be revived and explored in its original form.[26] They therefore rejected the idea, mostly put forward and defended by the westernists, that Islam itself was the cause of backwardness. For them, Islam should be purified of all of the superstitions and fallacious practices that had entered it after the *asr-ı saadet* (the period of felicity), namely, the period when the Prophet was alive and leading the community. The original sources should be studied directly and interpreted from the perspective of contemporary issues. Abdürreşid (most probably Abdürreşid İbrahim) stated, "While today we admit the decline of the nations of Islam, religion is yet what it was at the beginning of Islam."[27]

Şeyhulislam Musa Kazım Efendi's solution was to revive brotherhood among Muslims. In his article "İslam ve Terakki" ("Islam and Progress"), he

mentioned tribalism as an impediment to establishing brotherhood in a society: "Similarly, there will not be a trace of brotherhood among a nation as long as it is not forbidden from engaging in enmity, hostility, gossip, slander, lying, dissension, division, sedition, mischief, gender or tribal claims. Therefore, it is not possible for such a nation to survive."[28] Thus according to him, eliminating those acts and behaviors that cause enmity and division within a society and among Muslim nations would result in the unity that is so vital for progress.

His idea that tribalism should be forbidden in order to establish national brotherhood attracted the attention of Nüzhet Sabit (1883-1920) of the journal *Takip ve Tenkit*.[29] Sabit's defense of nationalism provoked a reaction from Babanzade Ahmed Naim (1872-1934).[30] In this long article, Naim distinguished between "pure Turkists" (*halis Türkçü*) and "Turkist-Islamists" (*Türkçü-İslamcı*).[31] In addition to fiercely criticizing pure Turkists for trying to establish a new faith and attempting to establish faithlessness, he held that Turkism and Islamism were mutually exclusive and that only the ideal of Islam, as opposed to Turkism, could save Islam. For Naim, a Turk could be served not because he was Turkish, but because he was Muslim. Naim was more friendly toward the "Turkist-Islamists" group and tried convince its members that Turkism does not help Islam and that it is unreasonable to serve Islam through nationalism. He asks them to give up having two Meccas: Turan and the Ka'bah.

Naim's criticism of nationalist Turks gives the impression that he viewed any kind of nationalist feeling as unacceptable in terms of Islam. However, he did express an acceptable version of it: "National zeal is forbidden and denounced. But in which way? If a person shows zeal towards his nation only because it is his nation, it is evil. If he helps his nation in a correct way and without showing enmity towards others, then it is, to the contrary, commendable."[32] This indicates that despite his intolerance of nationalists, Naim admits that a certain type of nationalism is acceptable and even "commendable" in Islamic law. This approach supports the argument that Islam distinguishes between good and evil types of nationalism and considers a non-violent, non-supremacist type of nationalism to be an acceptable ideology.

Within the pages of the Turkist publication *Türk Yurdu*, Ahmed Agayef – he later adopted "Ağaoğlu" as his official family name – challenged Naim's criticism[33] by focusing on the same Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions to defend nationalism. Arguing that Islamic sources condemn "zeal" (*asabiyet*), as opposed to nationhood, he strongly rejected Naim's claim that Turkists were seeking to replace Islam with faithlessness: "The Turkish youth

who showed indifference to religion until 4-5 years ago have now come closer to religion, became religious. It couldn't be any other way anyway."[34] He also rejects Naim's classification of Turkists and Turkist-Islamists.

Ruhi Güler rightly points out that although *İslam Mecmuası* was responsible for this debate, it was not involved in it.[35] Indeed, despite its nationalist tendencies the journal chose not to respond to or challenge the former Şeyhulislam Musa Kazım Efendi's statement on eliminating nationalism. However, it also refrained from defending him against the nationalist pressure of Nüzhet Sabit (not to be confused with Halim Sabit). *Türk Yurdu* did respond to Naim's outright criticism, although the latter's immediate audience should have been *İslam Mecmuası*.

I argue that the journal's neutral stance could be the result of personal connections, for Sabit and Kazım were on good terms with each other. In fact, Sabit joined the committee on madrasa reform upon Kazım's invitation to do so. Besides, his *Ameli Ilmihal* books series was a consequence of the latter's positive view of him.[36] As *İslam Mecmuası* published Kazım's series of articles that included the anti-nationalism quotation, it would have been tremendously impolite for Sabit to publish a criticism of him in that very journal. At the same time, it would have been against his ideological stance to defend Kazım, given his strong belief in the compatibility of Islam and nationalism.

Another point worth emphasizing is Agayef's defense of Turkish nationalism's religious aspect, namely, his argument that it helped establish and even revive religious feelings among its followers. Agayef believed that Turkist-style nationalism brought its followers closer to Islam, rather than replacing them with nationalist feelings. I argue that the Russian Muslim intellectuals' experience and definition of identity made such a tolerant and inclusive approach possible. For Russian Muslims, nationalism was not necessarily in competition with religion, for they did not hold that Turkism had to replace Islamism. To the contrary, Islam is included within Turkism and is one of its most significant traits. The intolerance of Ottoman Turkish intellectuals of different ideological camps is quite clear in Naim's approach, for he stops just short of accusing Turkists of infidelity. In the view of Ottoman Turks, the rise of Turkism could only weaken Islamism for it meant relinquishing control of the empire's vast non-Turkish Muslim peoples and lands and Islam's decline among Turks.

Russia's Muslims, considered national and religious identification to be the same thing, and thus held that Turkism could only lead to a constructive reformation of a Turkish state that would both include and save Russia's var-

ious Turkish Muslim peoples. In contrast, for those Turks who had experienced the nationalist revolts and separations in the Balkans and elsewhere in the multinational empire, any emphasis on national identity meant the empire's dissolution and, even worse, the collapse of the caliphate. That is why, I would argue, that the non-Islamist Ottoman intelligentsia mostly became westernists and blamed Islam for the Muslim world's backwardness. Thus the contributions of Russian Muslim intellectuals offered the possibility of a nationalist approach that was both tolerant toward and inclusive of Islam.

In order to better understand the late Ottoman intellectual context in which Russia's Muslim intellectuals operated, we need to elaborate upon the Ottoman scholars' views on nationalism. A major contribution to this issue was made by Said Nursi, who commented extensively on nationalism throughout his long life, which stretched from the time of the empire's end until well into the Republican period. Although he emphasized Muslim unity, his views on nationalism as expressed in his Damascus Sermon and other early writings, which were situated within the context of late Ottoman intellectual debates on nationalism, reveal a more balanced approach to nationalism. Many other traditionalist intellectuals denied any place for tribalism, whereas Nursi emphasized Muslim unity without demonizing nationalism. His later writings reinforced this view, for he made a distinction between good and bad nationalism.

It is useful here to analyze his views and their development over time in order to observe how Islam could accommodate nationalism within its universal perspective of Islamic unity. Nursi's 1911 Damascus Sermon, delivered at a time when a nationalist-inspired division between Arabs and Turks became an imminent threat to the empire, presented a clear argument on Islam and nationalism:

> With us Muslims religion and nationhood are united, although there is a theoretical, apparent, and incidental difference between them. Indeed, religion is the life and spirit of the nation. When they are seen as different and separate from each other, religious zeal encompasses both the common people and upper classes, whereas national zeal is felt by one person out of a hundred, that is, a person who is ready to sacrifice his personal benefits for the nation. Since this is the case, religious zeal must be the basis with regard to the rights of all the people, while national zeal must serve it and be its fortress.
>
> Religious zeal and Islamic nationhood have completely fused in the Turks and Arabs and may not now be separated. Islamic zeal is a luminous chain which is most strong and secure and is not born of this world. It is a support that is firm and certain and will not fail. It is an unassailable fortress that cannot be razed.[37]

The literature on Nursi persistently argues that he was against nationalism. Wahbi Zuhayli interprets the above quotation as being "fiercely opposed to nationalism."[38] Indeed, Nursi emphasizes Islam as the major bond uniting Arabs and Turks. But unlike the majority of his contemporaries, he does not reject national identity outright; rather, he recognizes its mobilizing power and intends to channel it into a nationhood defined by Islam as the common identity.

His words from the same sermon make this balanced approach more obvious: "[T]he two brothers, Arab and Turk, are like the shell and citadel of the nationhood of Islam and the sentries of that sacred citadel."[39] While at first sight these words emphasize Islamic unity, the underlying statement of Turkish and Arab identities actually denotes his recognition of nationalities and the power that national unity can provide. Nursi believed that the power of nationalism could serve the purpose of Islamic progress if channeled in the right direction.

This approach should also be considered in the political context of his time, namely, the possibility of the empire's disintegration due to separatist nationalism, as became visible in the Balkans. The constitutional regime and its new representative body witnessed increasing Turkish-Arab tension along ethnic lines. Therefore it is quite understandable that Nursi's main concern was maintaining the empire's unity, which accounts for his emphasis on Turkish-Arab brotherhood. Indeed, similar arguments were developed across the empire in such major centers of intellectual activity as Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, and Baghdad. Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, and other contemporaneous intellectuals were part of this ongoing discussion.

Another interesting point Nursi makes in this sermon is how the West adopted the idea of nation from Muslims and used it to move forward. Rather than the specific ideology of nationalism, this should be understood as a larger concept of the individual's devotion to the larger community. He states that instead of prioritizing the nation, selfishness prevailed among Muslims:

> Also because of the idea of nationhood, which those foreigners obtained from us, an individual becomes as valuable as a nation, for a person's value is relative to his endeavor. If a person's endeavor is his nation, that person forms a miniature nation on his own.[40]

Here, Nursi actually laments that Muslims have forgotten that the nation is superior to the individual. Thus he accepts the ideas of nationality and nationhood as essentially good ideas that had existed among earlier generations of Muslims. He values the promotion of the nation as long as it serves the interests of the entire community.

Although he emphasized Islamic unity to the detriment of nationalism in his sermon, which was addressed to a primarily Arab audience, he did not completely reject the latter. To the contrary, he embraced the individual's sacrifice for the community as an Islamic concept, an idea that he would develop further and express more clearly in his later writings. In those writings, he distinguished between positive and negative nationalism. But he had already done this as early as 1919 in his *Sunuhat*, in which he clearly states that an acceptable nationalism arises out of compassion and attachment to one's nation and that Islam rejects any type of racist and exclusivist nationalism.

In his later writings, especially after the nation-state's emergence, Nursi recognizes a certain version of ethnic nationalism as acceptable. He distinguishes destructive nationalism from the harmless version and decisively rejects divisive nationalist movements. By admitting that it is not possible to eliminate ethnic nationalism completely, he conveniently spares what he calls "positive nationalism" from his fierce criticism:

> Furthermore, in nationalism is a thrill of the soul, a heedless pleasure, an inauspicious power. For this reason those occupied with social life at this time cannot be told to give up the idea of nationalism. However, nationalism is of two kinds. One is negative, inauspicious, and harmful; it is nourished by devouring others, persists through hostility to others, and is aware of what it is doing. It is the cause of enmity and disturbance.

> Positive nationalism arises from an inner need of social life and is the cause of mutual assistance and solidarity; it ensures a beneficial strength; it is a means for further strengthening Islamic brotherhood. This idea of positive nationalism must serve Islam. It must be its citadel and armor; it must not take the place of it.[41]

Thus, Nursi favors the existence of nationalism that cooperates, instead of competes, with the idea of Islamic unity.

He criticizes any type of nationalism that causes harm, hostility, hate, and oppression of minorities. In other writings, Nursi brings out his Kurdish origin and criticizes the nationalism that obliges him to worship in Turkish. He also calls upon his Turkish brothers and reminds them that their Islamic identity is strongly embedded in their Turkishness and that one cannot exist without the other. While he encourages Turks not to replace their Islamic identity with an ethnic identity, he condemns the Arab nationalism that arose under Umayyad rule (661-750):

> Because they combined some ideas of nationalism with their politics, the Umayyads vexed the world of Islam, and in addition drew many calamities upon themselves. Also, the European nations have greatly advanced the idea of racialism this century; the ghastly events of the Great War showed how harmful for mankind negative nationalism is…"[42]

Nursi thus connects negative nationalism with racism. This point also brings up negative nationalism as a destructive force and the cause of WWI.

Western scholars of nationalism have also discussed "good" and "bad" types of nationalism. Kohn, in his *The Idea of Nationalism*, points out this distinction and argues that these two types of nationalism have different intellectual roots: "In spite of many elements in their thoughts and works to the contrary, Rousseau helped to lay the foundations for the democratic nationalism of the 19th century, and Nietzsche those for the fascist nationalism of the 20th."[43] Other writers use different concepts to distinguish between what Nursi calls positive and negative nationalism. David Brown identifies these "two ideal-type forms of nationalism, which are analytically distinct and antithetical in nature," as "cultural nationalism" and "civic nationalism" and argues that each type can be experienced in good or bad ways.[44]

Other conceptions eventually serve the purpose of distinguishing the destructive and exclusivist form from the more inclusive form. Peter Alter contrasts a liberal democratic concept of nation to a deterministic one that is undemocratic and irrational.[45] Hans Kohn distinguishes Western European nationalism, a predominantly political occurrence connected with individual liberty, from Eastern-style nationalism, including German, Russian, and Indian, which developed in politically and socially backward societies in an excessive and militant form.[46] Moreover, Calhoun emphasizes constitutional patriotism as a way to eliminate the fear of bad nationalism and argues that multiple thin identities, such as Islamism, can develop new social imaginaries and solidarity.[47]

Whether it is called cultural or civic, liberal or authoritarian, positive or negative, Nursi's main concern remains valid. In his view, as long as Turkish nationalism embraced Islam as an inseparable aspect of the Turkish identity and remained open to other, especially Muslim, nationalities, it was acceptable in Islamic terms. But the European type, which excluded religion from its identity, would be destructive for both the Turkish nation and other minority nations living in the same geography, particularly the Kurds.

Nursi's argument for the mutual coexistence of national and religious identities challenges the contrary arguments found in the scholarship on national-

ism. Eric Hobsbawm's argument that universal religions pose an impediment to nationalism is not valid for Turkish nationalism and Islam. Quite to the contrary, Nursi regards Islam as an indispensable aspect of Turkish national identity. Although he prefers to keep an Islamic identity over a Turkish one, he does consider the latter to be compatible with Islam, provided that it is a liberal interpretation inclusive of other ethnic minorities on the basis of a common Islamic identity.

Conclusion

The late Ottoman Empire witnessed lively debates on nationalism and its relationship with religion. Between the staunch nationalists who denied any role to religion and the more radical Islamists who denounced any form of nationalism, there existed a group of intellectuals who argued that both could exist side by side. For Gökalp and Sabit, nationalism could strengthen religion in social life as long as these two were separated into different realms. For Kazım, only Islam could be the uniting factor for the empire's many ethnic groups; however nationalism, if interpreted in the right way, could also serve this unity. Thus the intellectual rivalry between Islam and Turkism during this period was a complex and multi-layered phenomenon with a strong potential for reconciling both parties in a peaceful and meaningful way.

Endnotes

1. Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 87.
2. For this paper's purposes, *Islamists* refers to the traditional Muslim scholars in the later Ottoman Empire who may have supported reform in Islamic institutions. However, they were against any radical turn to westernization or nationalism.
3. Ziya Gökalp, "Fıkıh Ve İctimaiyyat," *İslam Mecmuası* 2 (1329 AH), 40-44; Ziya Gökalp, "İctimai Usul-u Fıkıh," *İslam Mecmuası* 3 (1329 AH), 20-23.
4. Gökalp, "Fıkıh Ve İctimaiyyat," 44.
5. Gökalp, "İctimai Usul-u Fıkıh," 22.
6. Ziya Gökalp, "Dinin İctimai Hizmetleri," *İslam Mecmuası* 34 (1334 AH), 2-5.
7. Halim Sabit, "İctimai Usul-u Fıkıh," *İslam Mecmuası* 5 (27 Mart 1330 AH), 145-150.
8. DIB archive; Halim Şibay Tuğsavul archive.
9. DIB archive.
10. Halim Şibay Tuğsavul archive.
11. Ali Birinci, *Tarihin Gölgesinde - Meşahir- i Meçhuleden Birkaç Zat* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayinlari, 2001), 54.

12. Halim Şibay Tuğsavul archive.

13. Ibid.

14. Halim Sabit Şibay, "Ziya Gökalp'a Ait Bazı Hatıralar," *Türk Yurdu* 26, no. 5-6 (1942); Halim Sabit Şibay, "Ziya Gökalp'e Göre Darülfünunda Cumhuriyet," *Türk Yurdu* 26, no. 5-6 (1942).

15. Halim Sabit, "Örf–Maruf," *İslam Mecmuası* 14 (23 Teşrin-i Sani 1330 AH), 418-25.

16. Halim Sabit, "İctimai Usul-u Fıkıh," 145-50.

17. Halim Sabit, "Örf–Maruf," 418.

18. Ibid., 323.

19. Ibid., 418-25.

20. Gideon Libson, "On the Development of Custom as a Source of Law in Islamic Law," *Islamic Law and Society* 4, no. 2 (1997): 131-55.

21. İzmirli İsmail Hakkı, "Örfün Nazar-ı Şerideki Mevkii," *Sebilürreşad* 293, 132. Unfortunately, the majority of the historiography focusing on Gökalp's theory neglects both Izmirli Ismail Hakkı's refutations and Halim Sabit's contributions.

22. Sami Erdem, "Tanzimat Sonrası Osmanlı Hukuk Düşüncesinde Fıkıh Usulü Kavramları ve Modern Yaklaşımlar" (Ph.D. diss., Marmara Univ., 2003), 213.

23. Halim Sabit, "Velayet-i Diniye," *İslam Mecmuası* 28 (14 May 1331 AH): 644-47; 29 (28 May 1331 AH): 662-64; 30 (18 June 1331 AH): 680-83.

24. Ibid., "İctihad ve İcma," 631.

25. Halim Sabit, "Velayet-i Hukukiye," *İslam Mecmuası* 31 (29 July 1331 AH): 728-29.

26. M. Şemseddin, Musa Kazım, Abdürreşid, Süruriddin bin Miftahüddin, and Halim Sabit all have similar approaches on this point.

27. Abdürreşid, "İnna nahnü nezzelnezzikra ve inna lehu le hafızun," *İslam Mecmuası* 4 (19 September 1334 AH), 1166.

28. Musa Kazım, "İslam ve Terakki," *İslam Mecmuası* 1 (1329 AH), 76. In Ottoman Turkish: "Keza bir millet adavetten, husumetten, gıybetten, buhtandan, yalandan, nifak ve şikaktan, tefrika, fitne ve fesaddan, iddia-i cinsiyet ve kavmiyetden şiddetle men edilmezse o millet arasında uhuvvetden eser bulunmaz. Binaenaleyh öyle bir milletin yaşaması da kabil olmaz." The connotation of this quote on nationalism will be discussed in a separate section.

29. Nüzhet Sabit, "Mecmualardan: İslam Mecmuası," *Takip ve Tenkit* 1 (1330 AH), 48.

30. Ahmed Naim, "İslam'da Dava-i Kavmiyet," *Sebilürreşad* 12 (1330 AH), 114-28.

31. Ahmed Naim is probably the first to call *İslam Mecmuası* Turkist-Islamist. He refers to the *Türk Yurdu* journal as "pure Turkists."

32. Ibid., 26.

33. Ahmed Agayef, "İslam'da Dava-i Kavmiyet," *Türk Yurdu* 6 (1330 AH), 2321.

34. Ibid., 2322.

35. Ruhi Güler, 'İslam Mecmuası' (1914-1918) ve İçeriği, (M.A. diss., Istanbul University, 1995), 57.

36. In his notes on his father's biography, Halim Sabit's son writes that Musa Kazım asked Halim Sabit to prepare the book series for schools. Halim Şibay Tuğsavul's archive.

37. Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı* (Istanbul: Nesil, 1996), 1961-75.

38. Wehbi Zuhayli, "The Quran's Universality and Bediuzzaman Said Nursi," Fourth International Symposium on Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, 20-22 September, 1998, Istanbul: *A Contemporary Approach to Understanding the Qur'an: The Example of the Risale-i Nur* (Istanbul: Sozler Nesriyat, 2000), 802.

39. Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 1963.

40. Ibid., 1969.

41. Ibid., 498-500.

42. Ibid., 500.

43. Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 238.

44. David Brown, "Are There Good and Bad Nationalisms?" *Nations and Nationalism* 5 (1999), 281-302.

45. Peter Alter, *Nationalism* [*Nationalismus*] (London: Edward Arnold, 1989), 1-20.

46. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism*, 325-31.

47. Craig Calhoun, "Imagining Solidarity, Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere," *Public Culture* 14 (2002), 147-71.